

1:Gurdon E-4, 5 (no date) 1907 AR7 Khasi AR7

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U DAKHOR SINGH, SIEM OF KHYRIM.

Reproduced from a picture by Miss Eirene Scott O'Connor.

[FRONTIS PIECE]

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A GROUP OF KHASI COOLIES.

Reproduced from a sketch by the late Colonel Woodthorpe, R.E.

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KHASI CHILD.

Reproduced from a picture by Miss Eirene Scott O'Connor.

[FACING P. 4]

Khasis are connected with people who inhabited the Malay 412
 Peninsula and Chota Nagpur at the time of the Stone 171
 Age.* That these people were what Logan calls the Mon-Anam, 144
 may possibly be the case. Mr. Peal goes on to state, "the dis-
 covery is interesting for other reasons, it possibly amounts to 141
 a demonstration that Logan (who it is believed was the first to
 draw attention to the points of resemblance between the
 languages of the Mon-Anam or Mon-Khmêr and those of the
 Mundas and the Khasis), was correct in assuming that at one
 time the Mon-Anam races and influence extended from the
 Vindyas all over the Ganges Basin, even over Assam, the
 northern border of the Ultra Indian Peninsula." Mr. Peal
 then remarks that the Eastern Nagas of the Tirap, Namstik,
 and Sonkap group "are strikingly like them (i.e. the Mon-
 Anam races), in many respects, the women being particularly
 robust, with pale colour and at times rosy cheeks." The 144
 interesting statement follows that the men wear the Khasi-291 ●
 Mikir sleeveless coat. Under the heading of dress this will be 171
 found described as a garment which leaves the neck and arms
 bare, with a fringe at the bottom and with a row of tassels
 across the chest, the coat being fastened by frogs in front. It
 is a garment of a distinctive character and cannot be mistaken ;
 it used to be worn largely by the Khasis, and is still used
 extensively by the Syntengs and Lyingams and by the Mikirs,
 and that it should have been found amongst these Eastern
 Nagas is certainly remarkable. It is to be regretted that the 144
 investigations of the Ethnographical Survey, as at present 211
 conducted, have not extended to these Eastern Nagas, who 171
 inhabit tracts either outside British territory or in very remote
 places on its confines, so that we are at present unable to state
 whether any of these tribes possess other points of affinity, as

* It is interesting to compare the remarks of M. Aymonier in his
 volume iii. of "Le Cambodge." He writes as follows:—"Mais en Indo-
 Chine on trouve, partout disséminé, ce que les indigènes, au Cambodge
 du moins, appellent, comme les peuples les plus éloignés du globe 'les
 traits de foudre.' Ce sont ici des haches de l'âge néolithique ou de la
 pierre polie, dont la plupart appartiennent au type répandu en toute la
 terre. D'autres de ces celtes, dits épaulés, parcequ'ils possèdent un
 talon d'une forme particulière, paraissent appartenir en propre à l'Indo-
 Chine et à la presqu'île dekkhanique. Ils fourniraient donc un premier
 indice, non négligeable, d'une communauté d'origine des populations
 primitives des deux péninsules, cis et trans gangetiques."

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171 Southern Moluccas the placenta is mixed with ashes, placed in
 174 a pot, and hung on a tree; a similar custom is observed in Mandeling, on the west coast of Sumatra. This is a custom universally observed amongst the Khasis at births. Teknomy to some extent prevails amongst some of these Malay tribes as with the Khasis. It will be seen from the above notes that there are some interesting points of affinity between the Khasis and some of the Malay tribes, and if we add that the Khasis are decidedly Malay in appearance, we cannot but wonder whether the Malays have any connection not only with the Mon-Khm̃r family, but also with the Khasis, with the Ho-Mundas, and with the Naga tribes mentioned by Mr. Peal in his interesting paper published in the Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, already referred to. We will study the strong linguistic affinities between these peoples in the section which deals with language.

M. Aymonier in "Le Cambodge" mentions the matriarchate as having been prevalent apparently amongst the primitive races of Cambodia, and notes that the ancient Chinese writers spoke of Queens in Fou-nan (Cambodia). If the Khm̃rs were the ancient people of Cambodia, here we have an important landmark in common between them and the Khasis. M. Aymonier goes on to speak of priestesses, and the Cambodian taboo, *tam* or *trenam*, which Mr. Lewis, the Superintendent of Ethnography in Burma, suggests may be akin to the Khasi *sang*.

DRESS.

291 Dress may be divided into two divisions, ancient and modern. It will be convenient to take the former division first. The Khasi males of the interior wear the sleeveless coat or *jymphong*, which is a garment leaving the neck and arms bare, with a fringe at the bottom, and with a row of tassels across the chest; it is fastened by frogs in front. This coat, however, may be said to be going out of fashion in the Khasi Hills, its place being taken by coats of European pattern in the more civilized centres and by all sorts of nondescript garments in the interior. The sleeveless coat, however, is still worn by many

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Syntengs in the interior and by the Bhois and Lynngams. The 291
 men in the Khasi Hills wear a cap with ear-flaps. The elderly
 men, or other men when smartness is desired, wear a white
 turban, which is fairly large and is well tied on the head.
 Males in the Siemship of Nongstoin and in the North-Western
 corner of the district wear knitted worsted caps which are often
 of a red colour. These are sold at Nongstoin market at about [435]
 8 or 9 annas each. They are brought to Nongstoin by traders [586]
 from the Synteng country, and from Shillong, where they are
 knitted generally by Synteng women. A small cloth is worn
 round the waist and between the legs, one end of which hangs
 down in front like a small apron. The Syntengs wear a
 somewhat differently shaped cap, having no ear-flaps and with
 a high-peaked crown. Both Khasi and Synteng caps are
 generally of black cloth, having, as often as not, a thick coating
 of grease. The old-fashioned Khasi female's dress, which is that
 worn by people of the cultivator class of the present day, is
 the following:—Next to the skin is worn a garment called
ka jympien, which is a piece of cloth wound round the body
 and fastened at the loins with a kind of cloth belt, and which
 hangs down from the waist to the knee or a little above
 it. Over this is worn a long piece of cloth, sometimes of muga
 silk, called *ka jainsem*. This is not worn like the Assamese
mekhela or Bengali *sari*, for it hangs loosely from the shoulders
 down to a little above the ankles, and is not caught in at the
 waist; in fact, Khasi women have no waist. It is kept in
 position by knotting it over both the shoulders. Over the
jainsem another garment called *ka jain kup* is worn. This is
 thrown over the shoulders like a cloak, the two ends being
 knotted in front, it hangs loosely down the back and sides to
 the ankles. It is frequently of some gay colour, the fashion in
 Mawkhar and Cherrapunji being some pretty shade of French
 gray or maroon. Over the head and shoulders is worn a
 wrapper called *ka tap-moh-khlich*. This, again, is frequently
 of some bright colour, but is often white. There is a fold in
 the *jainsem* which serves as a pocket for keeping odds and ends.
 Khasi women in cold weather wear gaiters which are often long
 stockings without feet, or, in the case of the poor, pieces of cloth
 wound round the legs like putties, or cloth gaiters. I have seen 000

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KA RIMAI SYNTENG.

Reproduced from a picture by Miss Eirene Scott & Connor.

[FACING p. 20]

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I have seen

women at Nongstoin wearing gaiters of leaves. It was explained to me that these were worn to keep off the leeches. The Khasi women might almost be said to be excessively clothed—they wear the cloak in such a way as to hide entirely the graceful contours of the figure. The women are infinitely more decently clothed than Bengali coolie women, for instance; but their dress cannot be described as becoming or graceful, although they show taste as regards the blending of colours in their different garments.

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The dress of the Synteng women is a little different. With them the *jain khrywang* takes the place of the Khasi *jainsem*, and is worn by them in the following manner:—One of the two ends is passed under one armpit and its two corners are knotted on the opposite shoulder. The other end is then wound round the body and fastened at the waist, from which it hangs half way down the calf. Over this they wear a sort of apron, generally of *muga* silk. They have the cloak and the head-wrapper just the same as the Khasi women. The Synteng striped cloth may be observed in the picture of the Synteng girl in the plate. Khasi women on festive occasions, such as the annual Nongkrem puja, do not cover the head. The hair is then decked with jewellery or with flowers; but on all ordinary occasions Khasi women cover the head. Wár women, however, often have their heads uncovered.

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Modern Dress.—The up-to-date Khasi male wears knickerbockers made by a tailor, stockings, and boots; also a tailor-made coat and waistcoat, a collar without a tie, and a cloth peaked cap. The young lady of fashion dons a chemise, also often a short coat of cloth or velvet, stockings, and smart shoes. Of course she wears the *jainsem* and cloak, but occasionally she may be seen without the latter when the weather is warm. It should be mentioned that the Khasi males are seldom seen without a haversack in which betel-nut, lime, and other odds and ends are kept; and the female has her purse, which, however, is not visible, being concealed within the folds of her lower garment. The haversack of the men is of cloth in the high plateau and in the Bhoi country, but it is of knitted fibre in the Wár country. The Syntengs have a cloth bag, which they call *ka muna*.

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291 The Wār men dress very much the same as the neighbouring Sylheti Hindus. The Wār women, especially the Shell women, wear very pretty yellow and red checked and striped cloths. The cloak is not so frequently worn as amongst Khasis, except in cold weather. The Lynngam dress is very similar to that of the neighbouring Garos. The males wear the sleeveless coat, or *phong marong*, of cotton striped red and blue, red and white, or blue and white, fastened in the same manner as the Khasi coat and with tassels. A small cloth, generally red or blue, is tied between the legs, one end of it being allowed to hang down, as with the Khasis, like an apron in front. A round cap is commonly worn; but the elderly men and people of importance wear turbans. The females wear short cloths of cotton striped red and blue, the cloth reaching just above the knee, like the Garos; married women wear no upper clothing, except in winter, when a red or blue cotton cloth is thrown loosely across the shoulders. The women wear a profusion of blue bead necklaces and brass earrings like the Garos. Unmarried girls wear a cloth tightly tied round the figure, similar to that worn by the Kacharis. A bag of cloth for odds and ends is carried by the men slung across the shoulder. It should be mentioned that even in ancient times great people amongst the Khasis, like Siems, wore waist-cloths, and people of less consequence on great occasions, such as dances. The use of waist-cloths among the Khasis is on the increase, especially among those who live in Shillong and the neighbouring villages, and in Jowai and Cherrapunji.

TATTOOING.

304 None of the Khasis tattoo; the only people in the hills who tattoo are certain tribes of the Bhoi country which are really Mikir. These tattoo females on the forehead when they attain the age of puberty, a straight horizontal line being drawn from the parting of the hair down the forehead and nose. The line is one-eighth to one-quarter of an inch broad. The Lynngams occasionally tattoo a ring round the wrist of females.

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WAR WOMAN OF SHELLA.

Reproduced from a picture by Miss Eirene Scott O'Connor.

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KHASI GIRL.

Reproduced from a picture by Miss Eirene Scott O'Connor.

[FACING p. 76]

769 *'iaw*, short for *kiauw* (grandmother), and *bei*, mother. *Ka Iawbei*
 171 is the primeval ancestress of the clan. She is to the Khasis what the "tribal mother" was to old Celtic and Teutonic genealogists, and we have an interesting parallel to the reverence of the Khasis for *Ka Iawbei* in the Celtic goddess Brigit, the tribal mother of the Brigantes. Later on, like *Ka Iawbei*, she was canonized, and became St. Bridget.*

769 The greater number of the flat table-stones we see in front
 578 of the standing monoliths in these hills are erected in honour
 787 of *Ka Iawbei*. In former times, it was the custom to offer
 776 food to her on these stones. In cases of family quarrels, or dissensions amongst the members of the same clan, which it is desired to bring to a peaceful settlement, it is customary to perform a sacrifice to the first mother, "*Ka Iawbei*." They first of all take an augury by breaking eggs, and if it appears from the broken egg-shells that *Ka Iawbei* is offended, they offer to her a cotton cloth, and sacrifice a hen.

[534] On these occasions incantations are muttered, and a small drum, called, "*Ka 'sing ding dong*," is beaten. It is not unlikely that the Khasi household deities, *Ka lei iing*, and *Ka ksaw ka jirngam*, to whom pujas are offered for the welfare of the house, are also *Ka Iawbei* in disguise. Notwithstanding the strong influence of the matriarchate, we find that *U Thawlang*, the first father and the husband of *Ka Iawbei*, is also revered. To him on occasions of domestic trouble a cock is sacrificed, and a *jymphong*, or sleeveless coat is offered. This puja is called *kaba tap Thawlang*, i.e. covering the grandfather. The following incantation to *U Thawlang* is then chanted:—
 "Oh, father Thawlang, who hast enabled me to be born, who hast given me my stature and my life, I have wronged thee, oh father, be not offended, for I have given thee a pledge and a sign, i.e. a red and white sleeveless coat. Do not deliver me into the power of (the goddess of) illness, I have offered thee the propitiatory cock that thou mayest carry me in thine arms, and that I may be aware of thee, my father Thawlang."

769 We see clearly from the above prayer that the Khasi idea is
 171 that the spirit of the deceased male ancestor is capable of

* Karl Pearson's essay on "mother age civilization."

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The bridegroom then sets out with

this man and a number of followers, clothed in clean garments and wearing either white or red pagris (a black pagri not being considered a fitting head-dress on this occasion), to the house of the bride, where a feast has been prepared, and fermented rice-beer (*ka-kiad-hiar*) in gourds (*klong*) placed ready. The bride, her female attendants, and her mother and aunts have collected in the meantime, dressed in their best, wearing their jewellery, and with their heads uncovered, for it is not thought proper for the females to cover their heads on the marriage day. On the side of the bride, also, a *ksiang* (go-between) has been appointed, and it is his duty to manage all the business of the marriage on behalf of her family. Some young men of the bride's party go to meet the bridegroom's contingent by way of doing them honour. When they have reached the bride's house, the *ksiang* of the bridegroom enters first, followed by the bridegroom, and after him the bridegroom's party. The *k-iang* then hands over the bridegroom to the maternal uncle (*kni*) of the bride, or to the bride's father. Either of the latter then provides the bridegroom with a seat next the bride. The bride and bridegroom exchange bags of betel-nut, and where the custom of investiture of the ring is in vogue, these tokens are interchanged. The *ksiangs* of the bridegroom and bride recite the marriage contract in lengthy formulae, which may be found on pages 6, 7, 8 of the late U Jeebon Roy's interesting notes on the Khasi religion. The two *ksiangs* then take up, each of them, a gourd containing fermented liquor from the gourd provided by the contracting party, and give them to an old man who is versed in sacrificial lore, who solemnly mixes the contents together. Three dried fish are produced, and are placed on the floor of the house. The priest thus appointed then solemnly adjures the gods in the following words:—

Hci, oh god from above; oh god from below; oh '*lei synshar*; oh god who hast created man; as thou hast ordained this marriage, the ring has been given this day; thou wilt know; thou wilt hear; from the clear firmament above that . . . have been married this day. Thou wilt bless them; thou wilt grant them prosperity; thou wilt show them the way; thou wilt show them the road, that they may be well, that they may obtain dwellings and houses,

585 of a Garo marriage. The Lynngams, unlike the Garos, do not
 782 observe which way the beaks of the fowls turn when they are
 787 thrown on the ground after being sacrificed. The Lynngams,
 like the Khasis, take auguries from the entrails of the fowls and
 the pig. After these ceremonies are over, the Lynngam pair
 are allowed to cohabit. The cost of an ordinary Lynngam
 585 marriage is from Rs. 30 to Rs. 40. The marriage system in
 435 vogue among the Lynngams may be described as a mixture
 of the Khasi and Garo customs. As has already been stated,
 161 the Lynngams are a mongrel breed of Khasis and Garos.

CEREMONIES ATTENDING DEATH.

764 The death customs of the Khasis are not only very elaborate,
 but possess a significance of their own, it is, therefore, necessary
 to describe them in detail; they are as follows:—

763 A member of the family bends down towards the ear
 of the apparently deceased person and calls him or her by
 name three times, to make sure that death has occurred.
 If no answer comes, the family laments, for it is then con-
 964 cluded that the person is really dead. The body is then bathed
 291 in warm water from three earthen pots and is reverently
 laid on a mat (*jupung*), where it is dressed in white cloth, a
 peculiar feature of the dressing being that the waist-cloth and
 turban are folded from left to right, and not from right to left,
 as in the case of the living. An egg called *u'eng k'poh*
 764 is placed on the stomach of the deceased, and nine fried grains,
 of rice *hadem*, or Indian corn, are tied round the head with a
 string. The rich place ear-rings in the ears and other jewellery
 on the body of the deceased, it being necessary that this
 jewellery should be specially made for the occasion, and they
 [775] deck the corpse with valuable cloths. A cock, *u'iar k'rod lyati*
 (literally the cock that scratches the way), is sacrificed, the idea
 being that a cock will scratch a path for the spirit to the next
 world. A sacrifice of a bull, or of a cow in case the deceased is
 a woman, (*u* or *ka masi pyawem*,) follows. Portions of the left
 leg of the fowl and the lower part of the jaw of the bull or cow
 are kept, to be placed afterwards in the *marshiang*, or bone,

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536 women from the Wār country, wearing their picturesque dress, amongst whom was the wife of the Siem of Bohwal with her little daughter. The dance was a pretty sight, and I have [1752] seldom seen such evidence of unaffected happiness as was exhibited by the people on this occasion. Dancing may be described as one of the characteristic features of Khasi life.

796 The Synteng *Beh-dieng-khlam* festival takes place annually at Jowai and elsewhere in the Jaintia Hills in the deep water moon month (a *Jyllieu*, or June). *Khlam* is the Khasi word for plague or pestilence, and *beh-dieng* signifies to drive away with sticks. The festival may be described as follows:—The males rise betimes on the day fixed and beat the roof with sticks, calling upon the plague-demon to leave the house. Having done this, later on in the day they go down to the stream where the goddess "Aitan" dwells. Then poles of great length, which have been newly cut, are held across the stream. The people jump on the poles and try to break them; when they succeed in doing so, a great shout is given. After all these poles have been broken, a very large pole is fixed across the stream. The people then divide themselves into two parties, and contend for the possession of the tree. The contest, however, is a good-humoured one, and although many buffets are given and received, these are not regarded seriously, and there are seldom any fights. [291] Col. Bivar says the contending villagers, in their excitement, sometimes relapse into a state of almost complete audity. The party which succeeds in obtaining possession of this post is supposed to gain health and prosperity during the coming year. [796] Col. Bivar remarks that the origin of this so-called ceremony is said to be that the god of thunder, "u'lei pyrthat," and Ka Aitan, the goddess of the stream, enjoined its performance. Many innovations, however, have crept in. People disguise themselves as giants and wild beasts, they also parade images of serpents, elephants, tigers, peacocks, &c. [538] [526] Dancing is carried on with enthusiasm by the males, the girls, clad in their best attire, remaining on-lookers. Before the meeting breaks up the males play a sort of game of hockey with wooden balls.

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U DAKHU, LYNGAM HEAD MAN.

Reproduced from a picture by Miss Eileen Scott O'Connor.
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considering. Some of the leading characteristics of the Lyngams will now be detailed. The Lyngams are by complexion swarthy, with features of Mongolian type. The men are of middle height and the women remarkably short, both ²⁴⁰ ~~when being not nearly so robust as the Khasis~~, a result due probably to climatic influences, for the Lyngams live in fever-haunted jungles. The men have very little hair about the face, although a scanty moustache is sometimes seen, the hairs in the centre being carefully plucked out, the result being two tufts on either side. Beards are never seen. The women are ill-favoured, and wear very little clothing. The men wear the sleeveless coat of the Khasi and Mikir pattern, called *phong-mawng*, which is made of cotton dyed red, blue, and white. This ²⁴¹ custom may have been borrowed from the Khasis. They do not grow their own cotton, but obtain it from the plains. They ²⁴² ~~make their own dyestuffs, changing from red to blue and black.~~ A cotton cloth, barely enough for purposes of decency, is tied between the legs, the ends being allowed to hang down in front and behind. Sometimes an apron is worn in front. At the present day the men wear knitted woollen caps, generally black or red, of the Nongpoin pattern (a sort of fisherman's cap), but the elderly men and head-men wear turbans. The females wear a cotton cloth about eighteen inches broad round the loins, sometimes striped red and blue, but more often only dark blue. A blue or red cloth is thrown loosely across the shoulders by unmarried girls, but married women only wear the waist-cloth, like the Garos. A cloth is tied round the head by married women, sometimes, Garo fashion. The women wear quantities of blue beads as necklaces, like their Garo sisters. They obtain the beads from the Garo markets at the foot of the hills. Brass ear-rings are worn by both sexes; the women, like the Garos, load their ears to such an extent with brass rings as to distort the lobes greatly. Silver armlets are worn by the head-men only, or by those who possess the means to give a great feast to the villagers. This is the custom of the Garo ²⁴³ ~~and~~ ^{head-}men. Both sexes wear bangles. The men also wear necklaces of beads. The rich wear necklaces of coral and another stone which is thought by the Lyngams to be valuable. A necklace of such stones is called *o'pivag lili* (god's necklace).

[p. 57]

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VOL. LXXIII. PART III.—ANTHROPOLOGY
AND COGNATE SUBJECTS.

No. 4.—1904.

- 101 *Notes on the Khasis, Syntangs, and allied Tribes, inhabiting the Khasi and Jaintia Hills District in Assam.—By MAJOR P. B. T. GRADON, Superintendent of Ethnography in Assam. (With plates III—IV).*

[Read 2nd August, 1904.]

- 142 1. *Physical characteristics.*—The men are seldom tall; they are generally well made, and possess great strength of limb,—of leg in particular. Their features show a resemblance to those of the Japanese; their complexions are fair, noses flat, lips thick, and eyes very frequently obliquely set. The women are good-looking, of a beauteous type, and are cheerful and pleasant-mannered. Children are sometimes exceedingly pretty. Khasis are inveterate smokers of *pa*,—both men, women, and children; the distances from place to place being measured by the number of betel-nuts that can be chewed on the journey. The hair of the males is shaved above the forehead pretty high up, and the remainder is gathered into a knot at the back of the head. Very few Khasis have much hair about the face. Both Khasis and Syntangs wear the characteristic coat (*lymphang*) loin-cloth, *jele alang* (a kind of

56 P. R. T. Gurdon—*Note on the Khasis, Syntengs, & Allied Tribes*. [No. 1,

291 small kilt), and a cap which is peaked in front and which comes down well over the ears, called (*ka tapia akor*) ear cap. The dress of the Khasi females is somewhat different from that of the Synteng, the former wears a striped cloth tied round the waist, hanging down to the knees, and another cloth, with a fringed border, knotted on both the shoulders to cover the bust and a narrow cloth, called *ka jympira*, to serve the purpose of under-clothing. A cloth knotted in front is also worn like a cloak over shoulders. The Synteng woman wears a cloth smoothed round the body fastened above the bust and drooping down to the ankles. Another cloth is thrown over the shoulders, and crossed in front. Both Khasi and Synteng women wear a cloth tied over the head, called *ka tap mekhlak*. Up-to-date Khasi males wear knickerbockers, stockings, and boots, and females chemises. On festive occasions, both Khasis and Syntengs, males and females, wear expensive silks, with carvings of gold or silver. There is a special dancing-dress of elaborate pattern: The women at festivals wear a circlet of silver with a spear-head ornament behind, rising 4 or 5 inches from the back of the head. Large coral beads are much valued, and necklaces of alternate beads of coral and gold, and sometimes of coral alone, are worn by the chiefs and their principal followers. Such necklaces are worn by 262 women also on gala occasions. The staple diet of both Khasis and Syntengs is rice and dried fish. They are, however, fond of all kinds of meat, especially pork. Some of the Syntengs abstain from beef, [17] owing no doubt to Hindu influences. Neither Khasis nor Syntengs eat dog, which is partaken of with zest by the Naga and the Garo tribes,—this is owing to the dog being considered by the Khasis to be the friend of man. Neither Khasis nor Syntengs use milk, the latter being thought by them to be an excrement. Neither Khasis nor Syntengs 411 tattoo. The weapons of both Khasis and Syntengs are bows and arrows, swords and shields. The national game of the Khasis is archery, regarding which a detailed description will be found in paragraph 10.

The people live in regular villages on fixed sites which have not 341 changed for generations,—and they appear to be much attached to these sites, where, as a rule, the family tombs are standing. The houses are built in the shape of a shell, the houses being divided into three compartments,—the *Shyngp*, or porch, where odds and ends, and sometimes fowls, are kept; *wagpet*, or centre room, which is used for cooking and sitting in; and *campet*, or inner room, where the people sleep. The houses are low, with grass roofs reaching nearly to the ground, the beams are of hewn timber, the walls are of either planks roughly hewn or of reeds or split bamboos plastered with clay. The Khasis' houses 342 generally have boarded floors raised some feet from the ground level,

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G. Khasi women of Kongton village.

H. Young Khasi women of Sheila village.

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[P. 96-B]

APPENDIX

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Shella

Confederacy forms a more marked endogamous community, through being cut off geographically and economically from the rest of the Khasi, and socially from the neighbouring Hindu people. 621

The Economy and the People.

Shella lies along the upper part of the Shella River and stretches upwards along the steep slope, looking down towards the Bengal plain. The climate of this part of the hills is considered to be one of the worst in tropical India for human habitation. The Bengal plain, though warmer than this area, is considered more healthy. This border land is the zone of malaria, typhoid, black fever, cholera, etc. None of the Bengalee peasants dare to live in such an area. However, it is the most fertile for products such as betel-nuts, pineapples, oranges, bananas and pineapples, and it also produces limestone. These people seem to prefer to settle in this zone and to enjoy its prosperity, at the expense of human lives: every year, especially between March and September, the inhabitants suffer from various fevers and dysentery and other diseases, many of the weaker facing death. 131 132 164 433 164

Before the Partition of India and Pakistan, the products of Shella were carried down the Shella River to Sylhet, one of the biggest centres in East Bengal, which brought unimaginable wealth to the Shella people. Their houses were built by carpenters from Sylhet. The style and structure of these houses were exceptionally elaborate for the Khasi. They purchased vast rice fields in the plain, which used to be cultivated by Bengalee and Garo labourers engaged by them. These Khasi do not themselves know how to cultivate rice fields; they have always been managers or landowners. Their boys used to be sent to high schools and colleges in Sylhet. As a result of their trading with the Bengalee, many of them read and speak fluent Bengalee. There is no difference between their style of clothing and that of the Bengalee, though the women maintain their traditional dress in the Shella style. 648 177 178 434 [439] 342 166 464 871 191 [291] •

They have thus been distinguished from the rest of the Khasi not only geographically, but also economically and culturally. Their personality also differs sharply from the rest of the Khasi. They are very sociable, and quick, a quality lacking among the Khasi of Sohkynduh and Kongton. They are clever enough to deal with strangers. The upland Khasi say Shella people are very cunning. This remark shows one side of these people. They had to be cunning, since they traded with the Sylhet Bengalee who were said to be the most cunning of their race. Their role in the trade and in the history of the modernization of the Hills was considerable. For centuries they represented intellectual Khasi owing to their contact with Hindu civilization, while the Hills remained in darkness. They assumed an important role when the British established an administration in the Hills, and even up to now, many leading Khasi originated from this area: for instance, Lati Hat, the first interpreter of the British Headquarters at Cherrapunjee; Jeebon Roy, who was the first Magistrate among the Khasi; Maham Sing, a lawyer and Member of the Legislative Assembly (the grandson of Jeebon Roy); Nichols Roy, Minister of Health and Prisons of the Assam Government, Member of the Legislative Assembly, and Missionary of the Church of God; R. R. Thomas (brother of Nichols Roy), Principal of the Gauhati University, etc. 157 184 648 177 178 [439]

Through constant cultural contact with Hindu, and encouraged by their economic prosperity, the Shella Khasi, like the Jaintias, have been much influenced by Hindu culture. However, this does not mean that the people of Shella adopted the Hindu beliefs. Though there is a small Hindu shrine, and some ceremonial elements were borrowed from the Hindu, most of the 177 648 771 795

796 The goats were sacrificed by his sister's eldest son (*Siem-khynnah*) and in
782 charge of respective units at the open courtyard. The priests evoked the
769 ancestors and ancestress and called upon them by name praying 'Oh God and
231 Goddess, I offer this sacrifice as our ancestors did. Bless the *Siem*, his family
and the people of his state. I shall beseech you again on this day after one
year. You create favourable weather by virtue of your power, bring clouds
and rains to yield bumper crops and ensure a happy and prosperous life.'

On the last day (Nongkrem), a man of Mawroh clan sacrificed a pig in-
troducing an iron spike in its left armpit. Nine pieces of meat from different
parts of the pig's body were again offered to their five ancestors. The *Siem*
in the presence of his *Durbar* performed the last item of festival by praying to
U Shillong, when the Chief of Rynjah clan also followed in the same way for
seeking the blessings of their Chief deity.

This brought the ritual to an end performed at the residence of *Siem*. The
five pieces of goat's and pig's meat offered to their five ancestors, were then
handed over to the in-charge of the five units considered as somewhat higher
in their State organisation. They distributed them at a suitable place in their
unit, making a feast as a sort of public declaration of the completion of their
greatest festival for the year.

DANCING

535 Besides the ritual described above, dance with the accompaniment of music
796 formed an important aspect of this festival. A dance known as *sad-tyngkoh*
[533] had been a regular feature for the first, second, third and fifth day. This dance
has some interesting features. It has to be performed in pairs. The first
pair was constituted by Chief priest and the Chief musician. Second to fifth
pairs were between the *Sindars* of the eight units after which *Siem* along with an
official of his council constituted the sixth pair. The subsequent pairs were
formed by any two persons from the gathering. They danced only after bowing
first before the Oak pillar (*Rishot*), then to *Siem* on the fifth day. This pairing
was then not adhered to on completion of the last rite of the festival.

• [291] A second type of dance (*Ka sad mastleh*) was then performed in the court-
[301] yard by the musicians as well as by the professional dancers (nong-shad) with
sword and fly-brush in the afternoon of the third day. The dance was always
held in pairs first by musicians, and then dancers, who donned their traditional
dress consisting of silk turban (*Jainspong*) decorated with feathers, coloured
sleeveless coat (*Jymphong*) silver chains and coral necklaces. Later on they
joined the procession, that went to the adjacent hill where after the completion
of the ceremony of goat killing, a group dance was performed returning to the
residence of *Siem* ultimately.

[291] This dance (*sad-nohkjar*) was performed by the *Siems* family. It was held
[301] early in the morning of the fourth day in the central hall (*Shlur*) and also
in the courtyard. The men put on their normal dress whereas the women
dressed themselves with gold and silver crown (*panngiat*), numerous silver
ornaments and different coloured blouse. They dressed and braided the
[302] hairs into a knot just at the nape. The High Priestess who also danced with
the members of the *Siems* family, stood in the middle of the line and chief
musician stood at one end. They hold each other in hand and danced round
the fire-place of the central hall (*Shlur*) in anti-clock-wise direction in accom-
paniment of music. The people assembled there, gave vent to their feeling
in their customary way every time, before they resumed to make it three times.
Similar performance of dances were also held in the courtyard.

216 ACCOUNT OF KHASI AND JAINTIA HILLS.

144 'ETHNOLOGY.—In order to determine the ethnological position of the Khásíás, we need dwell upon a few only of their physical characteristics, viz. those which are held to indicate that type of the human family, the Mongolian, to which they undoubtedly belong. A detailed description of their physiognomy would embrace forms and characters by no means common even to tribes occupying the hills in close proximity to them, much less referable to all branches of the Mongolian stock. These differences in detail, which may be attributed mainly to local influences, render it extremely difficult, if not absolutely impossible, to trace out the exact relation which these mountain tribes bear to each other. But the Mongolian, or to use a more comprehensive term, the Turanian, physiognomy is unmistakable in them all—Khásíás, Jáintiás, Gáros, Míkírs, Nágás, Manipuris, etc. The chief points may be briefly stated as follows:—

142 Colour tawny or yellow, though a darker hue is not entirely
[141] unknown; nose somewhat depressed, with a peculiar conformation
[302] towards the forehead at the glabellum, which is very flat and broad; face broad, flat, and squarish, with high and rounded cheek-bones; skull globular rather than square; eyes middle-sized and black, with a yellow tinge in the eyeball; eyelids obliquely set, but less acutely than in the Chinese and other Indo-Chinese races; mouth large, with prominent though not very thick lips; hair black, thick, and worn long, the orthodox style being to tie it up in a knot at the back, varying little with sex; beard remarkably sparse, but the moustache more abundant than the beard. The lower classes go
141 bare-headed; stature low in the majority of cases; constitution
[826] strong and robust; limbs thick, short, and stout; trunk long in proportion and very broad at the waist; calves over-developed, but this is considered an element of beauty, more especially in the women, who, on the average, are fairer and handsomer than the men; carriage ungraceful.

157 'SOCIAL AND MORAL QUALITIES.—Disposition very affable, gentle, and cheerful; rather industrious, but devoid of ingenuity and mechanical skill. In the industrial arts, such as masonry, carpentry, and agriculture, they are amenable to training. Dress amongst the lower classes is confined to a fringed jacket rudely woven of hemp, extending down as far as the thighs, and leaving the arms bare, together with a scanty covering for the loins. The more respectable classes wear a turban of coarse cotton or silk for a head-dress, and a sheet of silk thrown loosely over the shoulders, together with a long

THE KHASIAS.

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strip of fine silk for the loins, a part of which hangs gracefully as low as the calves in front. No notice is here taken of what has undoubtedly been added and borrowed from their more civilised neighbours in the plains. 291 •

'MARRIAGE. — The marriageable age for females is from 15 to 18; for males, from 18 to 24. Matrimonial alliances are contracted either through the parents or the living representatives of the families to which the parties belong. The mode of procedure is still very primitive and unceremonious. The bridegroom, escorted by a number of friends and relatives, goes to the house of the bride, where all are feasted and lodged for the night; on the morrow he leads the bride, accompanied by a number of her relatives, to his own house, and entertains the company with dishes of boiled rice and fresh pork. After remaining there a day or two, the newly-married couple return together to the house of the wife, which becomes their future home. Marriage is dissoluble by regular divorce, for any sufficient cause, and often without any assignable reason except mutual dislike or want of issue, the latter being the most common case of all. Marriage with the Khásids is simply a conventional arrangement, with nothing further for its object than the procreation of children; failing that, it is no longer looked upon as a contract permanently binding. Divorce is effected in the presence of eye-witnesses—the parents, or the heads of clans. Five cowries (*kaurfs*) are produced by the parties and exchanged, then cast away by mutual consent, and the ceremony is over. Parties once divorced can never again contract marriage with each other, but they are at liberty to marry into other families. Polygamy, strictly so called, is not sanctioned by Khási custom. Adultery is looked upon as a serious crime. If the five cowries have not been cast away by mutual consent, both husband and wife are held to be subject to the "matrimonial demon;" and even when either dies in wedlock, the survivor is not at liberty to contract a fresh alliance until he or she pays the family a sum of money as the means of removing the surviving party from subjection to the "matrimonial demon." The husband is a stranger, so to speak, in the family he has entered, and perpetuates the race of others, not his own. The children in all questions of lineage and personal rights follow the mother. There are always two interests in the same family—that of the husband, and that of the wife. Whatever the husband may have earned or acquired in

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